
Book Review

Israel: the ultimate 'rogue state'

by Jeffrey Steinberg

Gideon's Spies—The Secret History of the Mossad

by Gordon Thomas

New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999

354 pages, hardbound

According to this detailed history of Israel's vaunted foreign intelligence service, the Mossad, there is probably no nation on the face of the earth today that better fits the characterization of "rogue state," than Israel.

The Israeli Prime Minister is judge, jury, and executioner, presiding over a worldwide state-sponsored Murder, Inc. apparatus, which has carried out, by Thomas's account, hundreds of assassinations on foreign soil.

Israel, as state policy, recruits thousands of Jewish citizens of other nations to serve as spies, saboteurs, and black propagandists—frequently calling upon them to commit treason against their own states. When necessary, these *sayonim* ("Jewish helpers") are, like Jonathan Jay Pollard—an American convicted of spying on behalf of Israel—paid lucrative fees for their betrayals.

Through illegal means, Israel, over a span of several decades, has obtained an arsenal of weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear warheads and delivery systems, and biological weapons. As a matter of state policy, Israel has threatened "first use" of these weapons, in the event of a war with its Arab neighbors. Most recently, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has lowered the nuclear ceiling by threatening "first use" in the event of a perceived *imminent threat* of terrorist attack against Israel—adding a new dimension to "crazy state" geopolitics, and placing the Middle East and Persian Gulf regions on a permanent hair trigger for thermonuclear extinction.

What makes *Gideon's Spies* so fascinating is Gordon Thomas's seemingly well-documented claim that he had access to scores of top Mossad officers, including several former directors general, in writing the book. The names of many of these famous spies are contained in a "Notes on Sources" chapter at the conclusion of the book, and quotes and references to interviews with them can be found on every page.

Among the most noteworthy names "dropped" by Thomas are Meir Amit, Rafael Eitan, Isser Harel, Uri Saguy, and David Kimche.

On the surface, *Gideon's Spies* could be viewed as a warning from Mossad's warrior-mandarins against the politicization of the spy agency by ambitious politicians. The book does prominently feature a scathing personal attack—fully justified—against Prime Minister Netanyahu and his mercurial spouse, Sarah Netanyahu, for trying to assert micro-management control over the Mossad's activities, including its "wet works," to salvage "Bibi's" flagging political career.

Indeed, the final paragraphs of the book sum up the dismal state of affairs at Mossad headquarters, following a string of high-visibility covert operations failures that landed a number of Mossad agents in foreign jails, on charges of attempted murder:

"In the beginning," Thomas concluded, "the operational style of Mossad had been to do what must be done, but do it secretly. In one of his one-to-one meetings with a staffer, [current Mossad Director General Efraim] Halevy had said he would like to see the Israeli intelligence community become a united family once more, 'with Mossad the uncle no one talks about.'

"Only time would tell whether that is an unsupportable dream or whether, as many observers fear, the further Mossad is from its last public humiliation, the closer it is to the next."

It must be said, however, that the "trash Bibi" superficialities aside, Thomas's book represents a criminal indictment of the Mossad and the Israeli political establishment, for conducting murder and mayhem on a global scale. Above all else, it thoroughly debunks the oft-heard lie that "Israel is America's most trusted ally in the Middle East."

The myth of the 'U.S.-Israel partnership'

Gideon's Spies documents that, for a string of Israeli prime ministers, the United States was high up on the list of "enemies of the state." In the case of Yitzhak Shamir, the ex-Mossad operations chief and Reagan-Bush-era Prime Minister, the United States was the "Great Satan."

In this context, Thomas's book adds another dimension to the Pollard spy scandal: the reported witting role of Shamir in turning over America's most vital national security secrets to the Soviet Union.

Shamir personally authorized the delivery of some of America's most cherished national security secrets to the KGB, costing the U.S. billions of dollars, and causing the deaths of a number of American intelligence assets behind the Iron Curtain. At the height of the apartheid era in South Africa, Shamir and company also passed on information about U.S. intelligence operations to the South African government, forcing a dozen American intelligence officers to flee southern Africa, one step ahead of the police.

In another revelation that is sure to stir American military passions against Israel, Thomas detailed the fact that Israeli intelligence knew *in advance* that Hezbollah terrorists were

planning to blow up the U.S. Marine barracks in Lebanon, but refused to alert American authorities, thus contributing to the deaths of 241 American soldiers. According to Thomas, in August 1982, two months before the Oct. 23 truck bomb attack, the Mossad learned of the plan. "But at a meeting at Mossad headquarters overlooking King Saul Boulevard, staff were informed they were to 'make sure our people watch the truck. As far as the Yanks go, we are not here to protect them.'" Former Mossad officer Victor Ostrovsky told Thomas that the upper echelon of the Mossad took the view that, if the Americans "wanted to stick their nose into this Lebanon thing, let them pay the price."

In March 1984, when CIA officer William Buckley was kidnapped in Beirut, Director of Central Intelligence William Casey sought out Mossad Director General Nahum Admoni's help in locating Buckley and freeing him. Admoni swore he would help. Casey told Thomas, however, "We waited and waited. Sent our best men to Tel Aviv to work with Mossad. We said money was not a problem. Admoni kept saying okay, understood. Next thing Admoni was selling us a bill of goods that the PLO [Palestine Liberation Organization] were behind the kidnapping. We knew the Israelis were always ready to blame Yasser Arafat for anything. . . . By the time we figured it wasn't Arafat, it was long over for Buckley. What we didn't know was that Mossad had also been playing real dirty pool—supplying the Hezbollah with arms to kill the Christians while at the same time giving the Christians more guns to kill the Palestinians."

The assassins

Israel is the only country in the "free world" that has an explicit policy of carrying out political assassinations as an instrument of state policy. While many countries covertly engage in the practice of "executive action," Israel is unique in its openness. According to Thomas, Meir Amit, who headed the Mossad during 1963-68, set down a series of guidelines for how and when Israel would carry out sanctioned assassinations, guidelines that remain in force to this day. The policy was set in stone *prior* to the 1972 Black September Olympics massacre in Munich.

According to *Gideon's Spies*, the "Amit Doctrine" specified: "There would be no killing of political leaders. They needed to be dealt with politically. There would be no killing of a terrorist's family. If its members got in the way, that was not our problem. Each execution had to be sanctioned by the prime minister of the day. And everything must be done by the book. Minutes kept of the decision taken. Everything neat and tidy. Our actions must not be seen as some act of state-sponsored murder, but the ultimate judicial sanction the state could bring. We would be no different from the hangman or any other lawfully appointed executioner."

According to Thomas, as of 1998, the Mossad's assassination unit, *Kidon*, had 48 active members, including six women. They were based at a military facility in the Negev

desert. When in the field, the *Kidon* operates in four-person units; however, often, more than one unit can be assigned to a particular assassination or kidnapping.

By Thomas's account, the *Kidon* teams have been active throughout the history of Israel. In 1977, when Menachem Begin was elected Prime Minister, he brought the operations chief of the Mossad, Rafi Eitan, in as his "Adviser on Terror Against Terror," a euphemism for his chief "hit-man." Eitan immediately launched a campaign to assassinate all of the purported "planners" of the 1972 Munich massacre, where a number of Israeli athletes were murdered by the Black September group. All of the actual members of the Black September hit team had already been assassinated by Mossad. (And, in July 1973, a Mossad hit team murdered an innocent Arab waiter, who had the misfortune of looking like one of the Black September terrorists from Munich. In the past year, the chief of that operation, Mike Harari, was indicted by a Norwegian court, and he still faces a murder trial.)

In short order, the *Kidon* assassinated one of the alleged "planners" in Rome, shooting him 11 times, once for each of the Israeli athletes killed. In Paris, another purported "plotter" was killed by a bomb, planted in his telephone.

The last of the alleged Munich masterminds, assassinated by a car bomb in Beirut, was Ali Hassan Salameh. Eitan's motives for this murder may have been broader than the Munich events of 1972. On Nov. 3, 1973, six weeks after Black September assassins killed the U.S. Ambassador to Sudan, in Khartoum, a secret meeting was held between Gen. Vernon Walters, then the deputy director of the CIA, and Arafat. As the result of the meeting, a "non-aggression pact" was forged between the United States and the PLO. To secure the arrangement, Arafat appointed Ali Hassan Salameh as the liaison to the CIA. Thus began a long and fruitful back-channel relationship between the U.S. government and the PLO. In 1975, President Gerald Ford would hail Arafat for helping Americans to safely escape the civil war in Lebanon.

When Israel learned of the Walters-Arafat deal and the appointment of Salameh as the liaison to the Agency, then-Mossad chief Yitzhak Hofi tried repeatedly, but unsuccessfully, to force the U.S. government to sever the tie. It may shed further light on the Buckley case, and Israel's failure to assist DCI Casey in saving the Middle East station chief's life, to note that, according to Thomas, Buckley publicly praised Salameh as someone who "played a large part in winning the hearts and minds of the U.S. for the PLO. He was charismatic and persuasive and knew when to argue and when to listen. And, in intelligence terms, he was a super informer." Indeed, Salameh tipped the CIA off to a plot to assassinate the U.S. ambassador in Beirut, and he even exposed a terrorist plot to shoot down a plane carrying then-Secretary of State Henry Kissinger to Beirut during his infamous "shuttle diplomacy."

While Thomas does not draw the link, it is not at all inappropriate to ponder: Did Eitan order the assassination of Salameh to disrupt the CIA-PLO collaboration?